RTA Task Force Report and New Grants

Joint MassDOT/FMCB Boards

March 18, 2019

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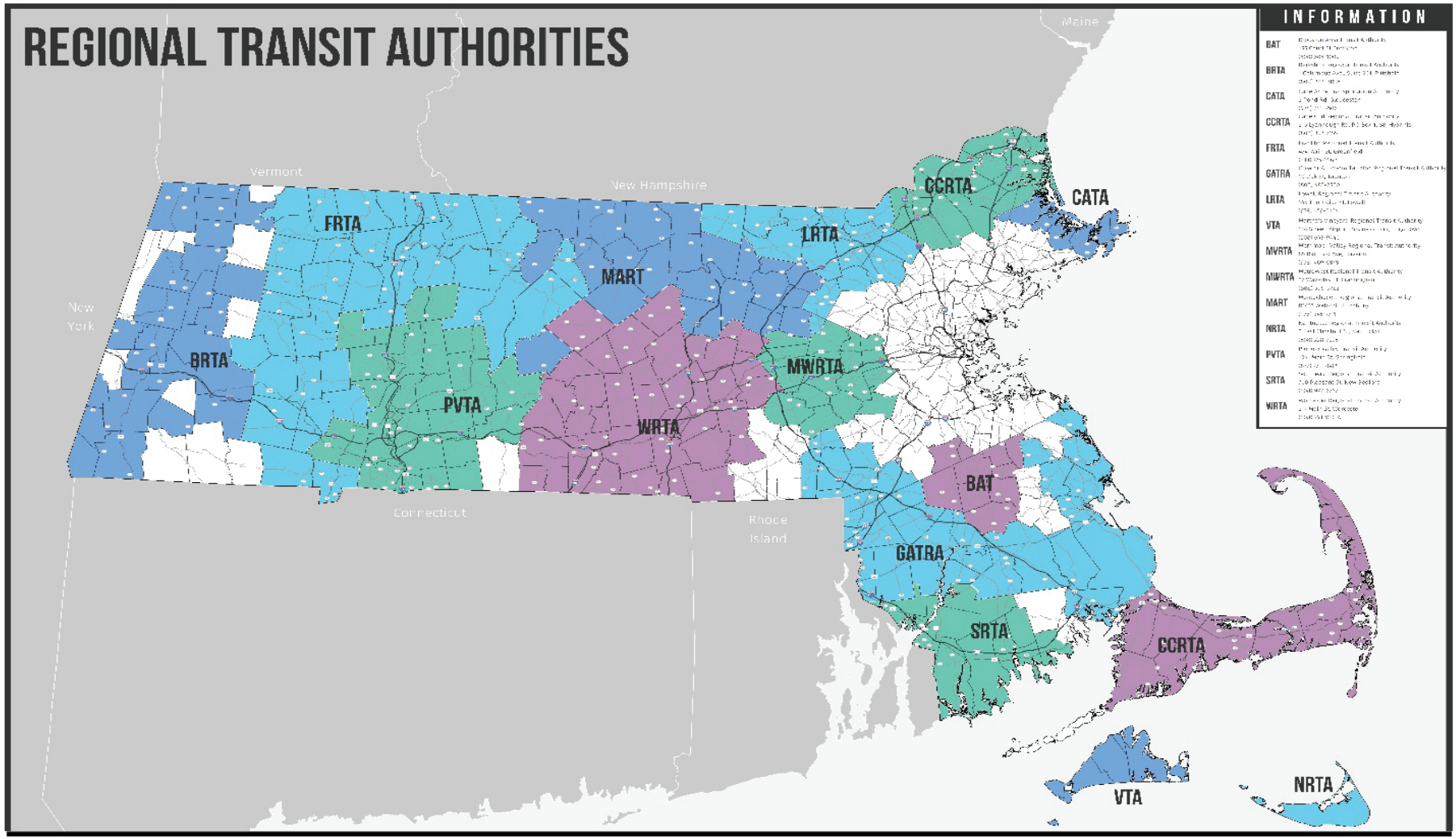
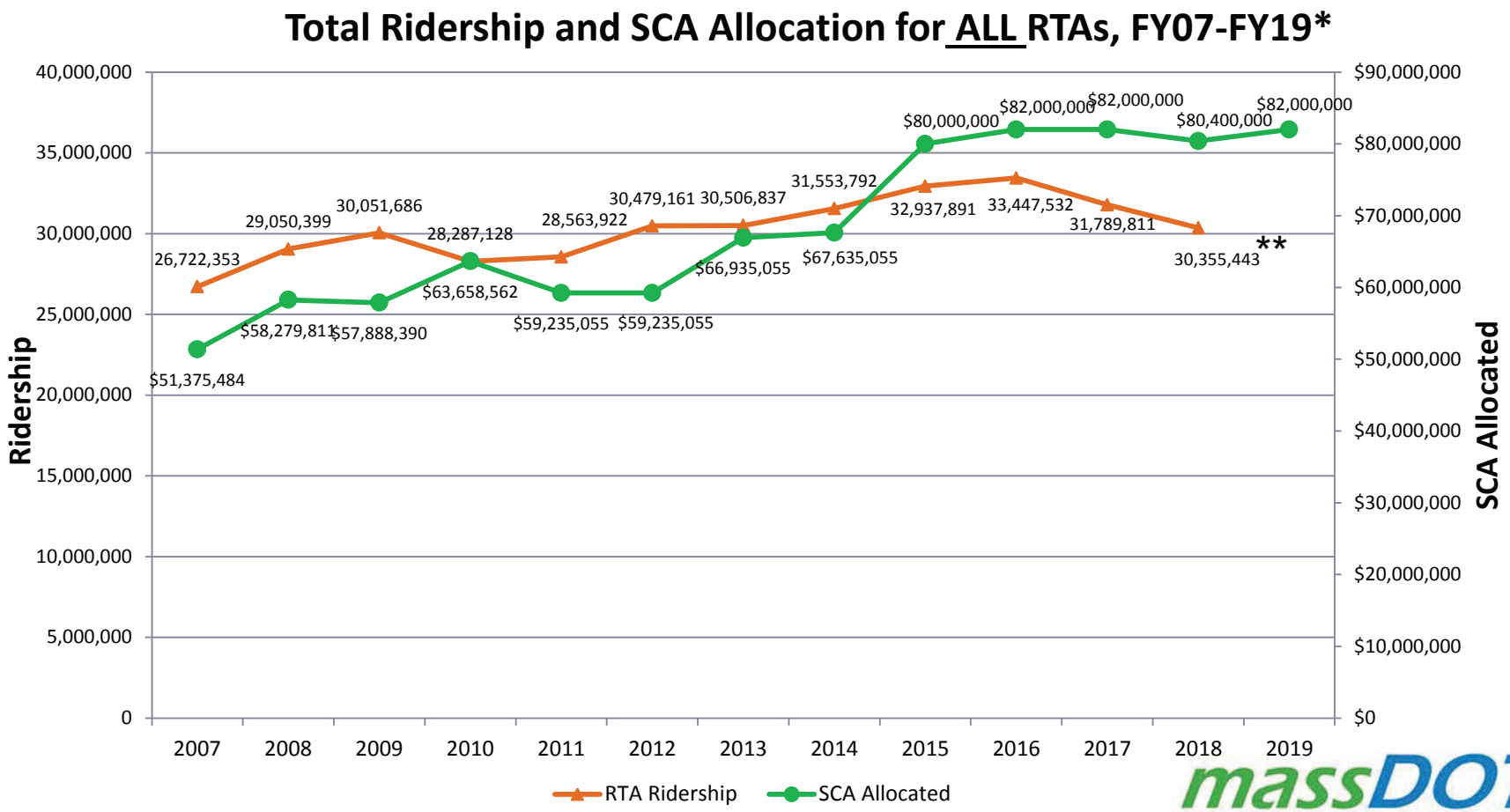
Overview of the RTAs

- There are currently fifteen regional transit authorities (RTAs) in Massachusetts.
- Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 161B establishes the RTAs and defines roles and responsibilities for agencies, municipalities, and the state.
- The RTAs are controlled by the municipalities in which they operate.
  - Each RTA is governed by an Advisory Board composed of member communities' chief elected officials or their designees, as well as one representative of the disabled commuter population and one representative of the local rider community population.
  - Advisory Boards appoint administrators, establish bylaws, and approve budgets, changes to service and fare adjustments.
- Although RTAs manage their own operations, they are required to contract with private companies to operate their services. This gives RTAs flexibility in making service delivery decisions.
- During FY2018, the RTAs provided nearly 28 million unlinked fixed-route passenger (i.e. bus) trips.
  - PVTA carried 39% of all riders, WRTA carried 11% of all riders, and BAT and SRTA each provided about 9% of all riders.

Overview of the RTAs



Overview of the RTAs

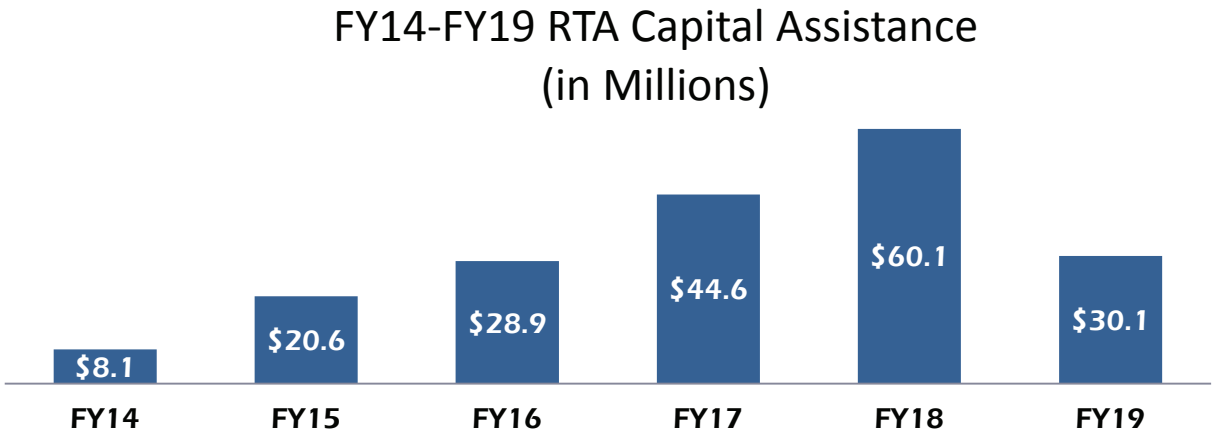


*FY14 figure does not include debt repayment bonus

**FY19 total ridership statistics not yet available

Overview of the RTAs

- MassDOT funded 96.92% of total state capital dollars requested by RTAs for projects in Capital Investment Plan for FY19, totaling over $30 million of investments
- Recent highlights
  - $62.3M for new PVTA maintenance garage from FY16-FY19
  - Providing VW Settlement funds for electric bus purchases
  - Commissioning studies to advise RTAs on issues associated with fleet electrification



RTA Task Force

- **Outside Section 72:**
  - Authorized a Task Force to look at RTA Performance & Funding
    - On Friday, March 15th the Task Force issued a draft report for public review.
- The Task Force's purpose is to investigate the challenges and opportunities facing transit service providers, specifically charging its members to investigate how the RTAs can:
  - best provide and improve transit services that meet identified community needs;
  - conduct regular service planning to maximize ridership using available resources; and
  - ensure that fares, local contributions, and other revenues cover an appropriate share of costs.
- The Task Force met 19 times from October 2018 through early March 2019 and produced a public review draft that has been posted.
- The Task Force voted for some recommendations, but also functioned by consensus so not all members support all recommendations.

RTA Task Force Members

19 Appointed Members:

- Rail & Transit Administrator of MassDOT, Chair
  - Astrid Glynn
- 2 members of the House of Representatives
  - Rep. Hannah Kane (for Rep. Brad Jones)
  - Rep. Sarah Peake (for Speaker DeLeo)
- 2 members of the Senate
  - Paul Lundberg, Gloucester City Council President (for Sen. Bruce Tarr)
  - Sen. Harriette Chandler (for Senate President Spilka)
- 3 persons to be appointed by the RTA Administrators
  - Angela Grant, VTA Administrator
  - Erik Rousseau, SRTA Administrator
  - Sandra Sheehan, PVTA Administrator

RTA Task Force Members (cont'd)

- 11 persons to be appointed by the Governor
  - 3 former or current RTA Administrators
    - Ray Ledoux, BAT Administrator
    - Edward Carr, MWRTA Administrator
    - Thomas Cahir, CCRTA Administrator
  - 2 experts in bus service planning
    - Lynn Ahlgren, Ahlgren Consulting
    - Melissa Dullea, Senior Director of Service Planning, MBTA
  - 2 chief elected officials of a city/town managers of a city or town served by an RTA
    - Mayor Daniel Rivera, City of Lawrence
    - Mayor Sefatia Romeo Theken, City of Gloucester
  - 1 representative of an employer or business organization served by an RTA
    - Stephanie Cronin, Middlesex 3 Coalition
  - 1 RTA Advisory Board member representing the RTA's rider community
    - Franny Osman, rider rep. for LRTA
  - 1 RTA Advisory Board member representing the RTA's disabled population
    - Catherine Klabish, disabled rider rep. for BAT
  - 1 representative of an organization that advocates for RTA riders
    - Gail Farnsworth French, Quaboag Valley CDC

RTA Task Force Meetings

- Discussion topics ranged from how RTAS provide brokerage service for EOHHS to how RTAS can participate in MEPA reviews for economic development projects
- Major topics included:
  - Performance Metrics
    - Ridership
    - Customer service & satisfaction
    - Asset management
    - Financial performance (including farebox recovery ratio)
  - Funding
    - Farebox recovery ratio
    - State Contract Assistance (SCA)
  - Service Decisions
    - Levels of service and service planning
  - Best Practices
    - Maximizing ridership
    - Partnerships
    - Entrepreneurial/good business practices
    - Transit oriented development (TOD)
    - RTAs as Mobility Managers
    - Technical assistance from MassDOT
    - Brokerage with Human Service Transportation (HST)

Why a Task Force?

A Mandate for "Change"

- Performance tied to funding
- Best practices
  - Increased ridership and financial sustainability
  - Service to vulnerable populations
  - Some RTAs are more successful than others, need to encourage the sharing of best practices
- Expectations for transit are changing; RTAs as Mobility Managers
  - Mobility as a service

Task Force Report Highlights

Major Recommendations: Investment & Performance

- As the single largest funder of the RTAs (39% of RTA operating budgets), the Commonwealth has urged (and the Task Force has endorsed) a closer tie between performance and funding and the adoption of individual performance targets for:
  - Ridership
    - Fundamental gauge of transit's value
    - Riders, not miles or hours, is the goal
  - Customer service and satisfaction
    - Is the service attractive, responsive, and convenient?
    - Using outreach/feedback to learn what would attract more riders more often
  - Asset management
    - FTA required Asset Management Plans to inform MassDOT's CIP process
  - Financial performance (including farebox and own source revenue)
    - Encourage frequent, modest fare adjustments that reflect equity analyses and that consider impacts on riders
      - Average RTA fixed route farebox recovery ratio is 16%
      - Almost half the RTAs have raised fares in last 2 years, but some have not raised fares in a decade
    - Understand financial sustainability of routes and other initiatives
    - Reduce likelihood of deficits

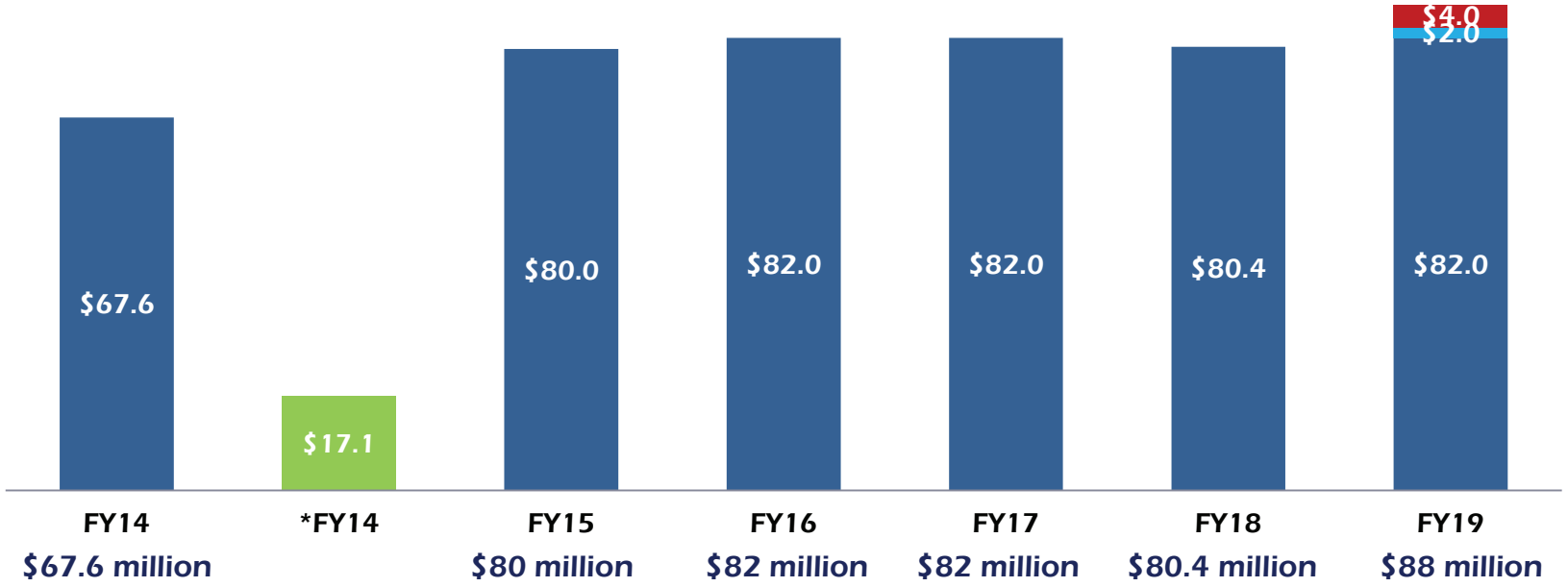
Task Force Report Highlights

Major Recommendations: Investment & Performance (cont'd)

- The Task Force will recommend an increase in FY20 State Contract Assistance (SCA) to $90.5M and an annual escalator similar to that of the MBTA
  - MBTA escalator keyed to CPI
- Differs from Administration's budget proposal ($86M), which would essentially replicate FY18 funding for traditional SCA and discretionary grants
  - In FY19, $82m was distributed to all the RTAs as traditional SCA, $4m more was provided through competitive grants, and $2m was provided to 2 RTAs as special deficit relief.
- The Task Force's recommendation is intended to provide predictable funding commensurate with RTA's other main funding sources
  - Federal funding and local assessments have both been increasing annually by some 2+%
  - Since forward funding in FY14, SCA has been level funded or inconsistently increased
    - *See chart on next slide*

Task Force Report Highlights

FY14-FY19 State Operating Assistance to RTAs (in Millions)



Task Force Report Highlights

Major Recommendations: Investment & Performance (cont'd)

- All state contract assistance will be connected to the performance targets via MOUs
- MOUs will be bilaterally negotiated between MassDOT and each RTA and will include appropriate timelines for implementation and reporting.
- The MOUs will use data reported by the RTAS in the following areas to create targets based on agreed upon baselines. Targets incorporated in each MOU would be those most relevant to each RTA's unique system.
  - Ridership;
    - Unlinked passenger trips
  - Customer service and satisfaction;
    - Scheduled trips operated
    - Vehicle revenue hours (VRH)
    - Vehicle revenue miles (VRM)
    - On-time performance
    - Outreach and customer feedback systems
  - Asset management;
    - Total Asset Management performance measures, as required by the FTA
    - Miles between road calls
    - Preventable accidents by 100,000 miles
  - Financial performance
    - Operating expenses by revenue hour, revenue mile and unlinked passenger
    - Farebox recovery ratio
- "Stretch" targets may be added that would not be subject to the same expectations as the baseline targets and would encourage RTAs to be entrepreneurial.

Task Force Report Highlights

Major Recommendations: Best Practices & Service Decisions

- RTAs differ in size, services, and demographics, but they all face the challenge of moving from traditional service patterns to being Mobility Managers
- As stated in the report of the Governor's Commission on the Future of Transportation, regional transit needs a new paradigm, particularly for service in Gateways Cities and in rural areas
- MassDOT can help RTAs' make data-driven decisions by providing technical assistance.
  - AFC 2.0 would allow the RTAs collect better data for route planning and adjustments to fare structures, while still maintaining an accessible system for cash customers as appropriate
  - MassDOT can facilitate joint procurements among the RTAs and increased use of state and Federal purchasing systems
  - MassDOT can provide assistance with subjects such as conversion to electric buses, fare equity analyses, and route evaluations.
- RTAs will be encouraged to develop pilot programs using innovative transit delivery models to improve service delivery. This would build on the example of the $4M special discretionary program authorized for FY19.

Task Force Report Highlights

Major Recommendations: Best Practices & Service Decisions (cont'd)

- RTA service should maximize multimodal connectivity by:
  - Developing local options/partnerships to provide first mile/last mile service to commuter rail stations
  - Working with communities so sidewalks/bike lanes around bus stops are safe and accessible, as recommended in MassDOT Bike and Ped plans
- When making decisions on new projects, fare changes, and service planning, RTAs should strive to include potential riders as well as current riders by:
  - Leveraging opportunities with regional and local planners when new housing/employment centers are being considered
  - Involving the business community on a regular basis
- RTAs often serve varying land use patterns and need different service approaches for high and low density areas, such as:
  - Good mapping practices for high density areas so routes can attract riders within a 5 minute walk of a bus stop
  - Meeting demonstrated need in low density areas by using microtransit, on-demand service, municipal shuttles, or partnerships with COAs or TMAs

Task Force Report Highlights

Major Recommendations: Best Practices & Service Decisions (cont'd)

- RTAs can continue to succeed by understanding their markets so their service networks meet the current and future mobility needs of their region, as well as support connectivity to other regions where possible.
  - Cross-border service can help meet regional demand and grow ridership
  - Partnerships with key stakeholders (ex: Colleges, Hospitals, Employer Groups) can help RTAs provide services targeted to demonstrated needs
  - Regular updates to the RTAs' Comprehensive Regional Transit Plans (CRTPs), periodic service evaluations based on RTA service policies and standards, and participation in local and regional planning processes can enhance service choices
- RTAs should provide reliable paratransit service in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and consider the feasibility of offering additional services beyond ADA that meet the needs of their communities.
  - RTAs should also implement an easy-to-use scheduling system using technology that improves the customer experience

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Task Force Report Highlights

Major Recommendations: Accountability

- There should be a reinvigorated RTA Council that fosters greater collaboration, promotes best practices, and provides a statewide vision for RTAs.
  - The RTA Council can provide an opportunity to review technical assistance needs and to invite thought leaders and key stakeholders to work with the RTAs and MassDOT.
- The RTAs and MassDOT will collaborate to implement the vision of the Task Force report:
  - RTAs and their Advisory Boards still maintain day-to-day local control of their systems and decision-making
  - MOUs between each RTA and MassDOT will set targets for performance
  - RTA Council will be used as a "cross-cutting" forum for discussion to establish a vision for RTA performance and best practices

Major Recommendations: Environmental Sustainability

- To reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector by at least 40 percent by 2040, the RTAs and MassDOT should determine the mode shift required to meet that goal and with local partners to create a long term environmental sustainability plan.
- In keeping with the report of the Commission on the Future of Transportation and following the MBTA's plan for fleet conversion, RTAs should plan for bus purchases after 2035 to be zero-emission.

Next Steps

- Task Force:
  - Public meeting schedule:
    - *Worcester Public Library, March 20th from 5:00PM-7:00PM (WRTA)*
    - *Hyannis Transportation Center, March 21st from 3:00PM-5:00PM (CCRTA)*
    - *UMass Amherst Campus Center, March 22nd from 4:00PM-6:00PM (PVTA/FRTA)*
  - Written comments from the public regarding the draft report can be submitted via email until 5:00PM, on Friday, March 29th
  - MassDOT will assemble the public comments and the Task Force will meet to consider any revisions to the report based on the public comments
  - Report will be filed with the Legislature per the language that created the Task Force
- MOUs:
  - Establish clear links between performance and funding, including individual MOUs to establish each RTAS's targets for ridership, customer service and satisfaction, asset management, and financial performance
  - MassDOT to offer technical assistance to facilitate data driven decision-making and the adoption of best practices
- Further decisions will await FY20 budget

Discretionary Grant Program

- **Outside Section 74:**
  - Authorized MassDOT to award $4M in discretionary grants to RTAs that proposed innovative ways to meet the challenge of service, particularly to priority populations.
    - On Tuesday, March 5th, MassDOT announced 21 awards to all 15 RTAs
- Competitive applications for up to $4M to award RTAs that provide best practice services and/or seek to initiate, maintain or expand service to a priority population.
- Eligible projects:
  - Targeted operating assistance, the implementation of technology improvements, and/or the evaluation of services that will lead to the implementation of best practice improvements in the transit system
  - The support of new services and/or the provision of an innovative and sustainable approach to serving priority populations, such as the challenges facing workforce transportation
  - The implementation of best practices that generate new riders, particularly among priority populations
- All funded activities considered as pilots that must demonstrate how they will be financially sustainable since additional future state funding is uncertain and not guaranteed
- All project proposals were reviewed by a committee including the MassDOT Rail and Transit Division staff and Office of Transportation Planning staff, and were selected on a competitive basis
- Awards will be finalized through MOUs containing performance metrics

Discretionary Grant Program

- $4 million distributed competitively – augmented by $1.1m in capital grants
- List of awarded FY19 Competitive Innovation Funds projects:

RTA	Description of Awarded Project	Capital Award	Operating Award
BAT	Expanded service to Stoughton by increasing direct service to downtown Stoughton, connecting two different commuter rail lines, and integrating an underserved business district .	-	$178,750
BAT	Increased service of busiest route to the Ashmont MBTA Station through two additional round trips	-	$103,500
BAT	Increased service to Bridgewater State University (BSU) through four additional round trips per day.	-	$15,000
BRTA	Pilot to extend service hours for BRTA bus Route 11 and Route 11X serving Berkshire Community College (BCC) with final runs on BRTA bus Route 21 Express and BRTA bus Route 1.	-	$361,128
CATA	Pilot for on-demand transportation services in Gloucester and Rockport to extend transit services beyond regular hours and on weekends using QRyde on-demand technology.	$215,777	$184,223
CCRTA	Enhanced intra-agency intermodalism via fixed route, trolley & app-based on-demand feeder service in the Falmouth area.	$176,500	$305,970
FRTA	Micro-transit service to low-income populations in towns of Greenfield, Turners Falls, Millers Falls, Orange, Wendell, Warwick, and New Salem via same-day and next-day transportation.	$86,975	$153,575
GATRA	TransLoc, Inc. pilot demonstration project.	-	$300,000
LRTA	Pilot for Sunday service for 10 bus routes that service the Greater Lowell Region.	-	$325,338
MART	Pilot for a self-sustaining micro-transit model in the city of Fitchburg by utilizing advanced transportation software.	$278,000	$210,000
MVRTA	Creation of a target marketing advertising campaign for Spanish language television.	-	$150,000

Discretionary Grant Program

- List of awarded FY19 Competitive Innovation Funds projects (cont'd):

RTA	Description of Awarded Project	Capital Award	Operating Award
MVRTA	Improvement of system management and customer outreach in MVRTA Office of Special Services. Two-part project for the installation of new mobile data terminals (MDTs) to interface with management software, and for the installation of new Interactive Voice Response (IVR) telephone notification system.	$156,700	-
MWRTA	Route 20 Shuttle Pilot, for fixed route service from the Wayside Country Store in Marlborough to the Riverside MBTA Station in Newton along the Route 20 corridor.	$50,000	$300,000
MWRTA	First mile/last mile service enhancements for MetroWest region using innovative commuter app and aggressive marketing at commuter rail stations.	$50,000	$300,000
NRTA	Continued marketing for new year-round fixed route service (December 2018 - April 2019). Funding would go towards bilingual ads, sound bites, etc.	-	$30,375
PVTA	Improve customer experience and draw new commuters to Springfield by creating an express service that only stops at major points of interest along the Route B7 alignment, reducing end-to-end time from 50 mins to 35 mins, and to P20 Express.	-	$384,187
PVTA	G1 Service enhancements to 20-min headways.	-	$216,054
SRTA	Pilot night service expansion for Fall River Route 5 and New Bedford Route 8 for 18 months.	-	$183,200
VTA	Restore optimal fixed route operations on the two most viable and busiest routes (Route 1 and Route 13) which often exceed vehicle capacity during peak periods.	-	$83,500
WRTA	Implementation of online paratransit trip reservation system.	$70,000	$120,200
WRTA	Next-day paratransit trip reservations/scheduling pilot for rural communities of Southbridge, Spencer, Sturbridge and Webster.	$61,000	$95,000